THE EMERGENCE OF

STEAMPUNK

DANIEL SILVA

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Previous Page Spread, Top, and Right Page:
Eric Freitas, *Mechanical No.6.*
2009. Sculpture.

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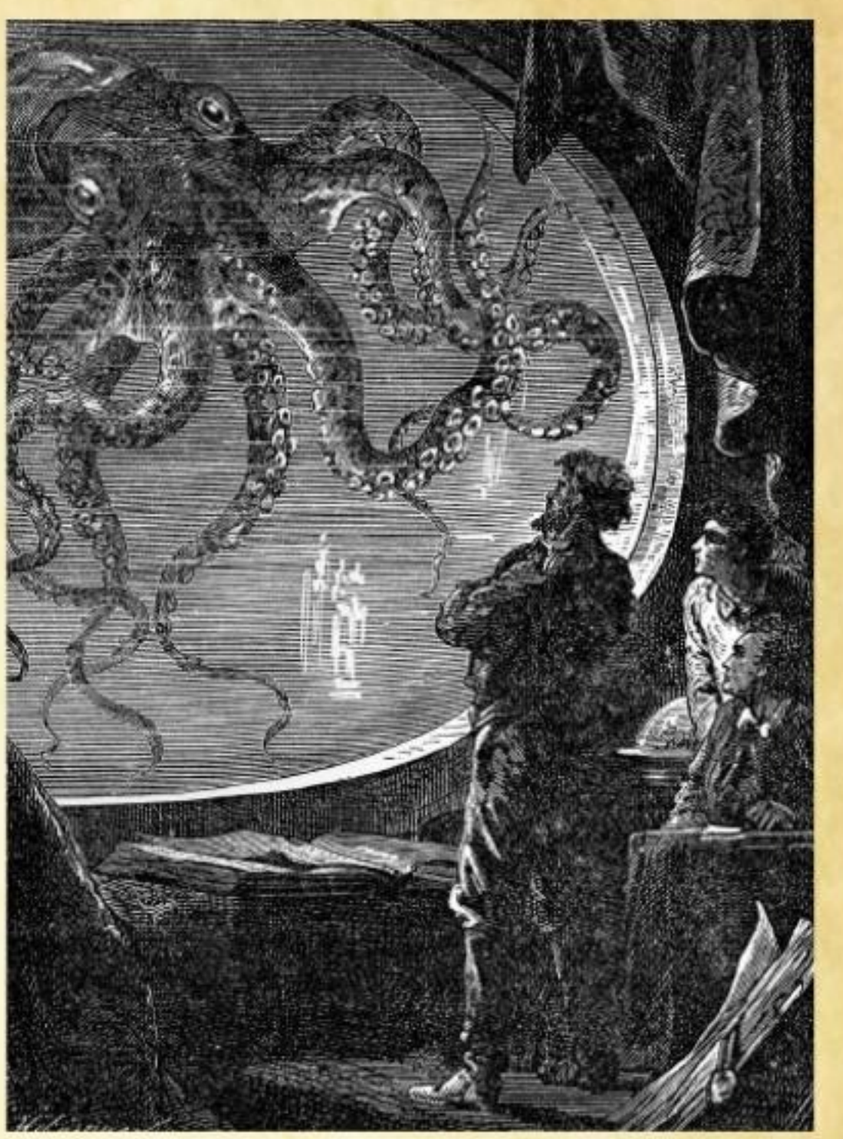
Left: Cara a.k.a. Arenyth, *Penny and her Balloon*. 2007. Digital artwork.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the word 'Steampunk' has gone from being a generic name, used to describe a loosely linked group of Science Fiction novel, to describing a global movement - a movement that now encompasses fashion, design, art, music, literature and more. During that time the label has come to mean different things to different people. For many it's a celebration of Victorian technology and aesthetics, to others it's about a past that almost was and a future that could have been. It's about a fictional place in time and space where Victorian and Edwardian elegance collide with gothic horror and modern science - a sepia tinted world where *My Fair Lady* meets *The Terminator*. It encompasses the romance of flickering gas lamps, foggy streets bustling with horse-drawn hansom cabs, men dressed in frock coats and top hats, women in bustles and corsets; but it also juxtaposes those images with a world of steam-powered robots and airships, of analogue computers. It's about recapturing the wonder and excitement of the *fin de siècle* novels of H.G. Wells and the *Voyages Extraordinaires* of Jules Verne, but also about acknowledging the grime, soot, squalor and chaos of the 'dark satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution.

Like Neo-Victorianism, which preceded and then paralleled it, Steampunk is in some ways a form of escapism - a yearning for a simpler time, a period in which there was little doubt that the future, with technology's help, was going to get better and brighter. With hindsight this was an age of relative innocence when the threat of extinction by nuclear or biological weapons simply did not exist. Indeed, none in the Victorian era would really believe that the world as they knew it could come to a sudden, violent end - a luxury which few of us can now share. But, more significantly, (and this is where we put the 'Steam' into Steampunk) there is also a longing for an age in which machines were awe-inspiring steam-powered engines and magnificent clockwork mechanisms of gleaming brass, polished wood and shining steel - so unlike today's bland boxes of micro-chips, grey plastic and hidden, integrated circuits.

One has to be lucky enough to witness the raw power and grandeur of a restored steam locomotive, belching smoke as it pulls out of a railway station, and compare it with the characterless, box-like utilitarianism of a modern electric suburban train, to see the allure of the steam age.



Above: Captain Nemo looking at the big sea monster, from Jules Verne's *20,000 Lieues Sous les Mers*. Illustration by Alphonse de Neuvilled and Édouard Riou, from the Hetzel edition of 1871.

Left: Patrick Reilly, *Steampunk*. 2007. Digital artwork.

Top: Catell-Ruz, *Steampunk airship.*
2011. Digital artwork.

Above: *Bioshock* series of games, *Big Daddy,* a spliced human being heavily armed.
2007. Video game.

It isn't only the relentless changes and technological advances of the Victorian period that makes it so interesting for those looking back from the other side of the 20th Century. The late Victorian era is, in so many ways, tantalisingly similar to our own.

The average 21st Century inhabitant of London, New York or Paris would have little problem understanding or being understood by the 1890 inhabitants of those cities (or by the characters of Jules Verne's or H. G. Wells' novels) and would find those societies having many parallels with their own.

Just as today society is being changed at a furious pace by modern technology, so too was 19th Century society - as urbanisation and industrialisation fast replaced the slow rural life of previous centuries. In purely materialistic terms too, we of the present would find much to recognise in the 1890s, such as trains, banks, department stores, newspapers, public libraries, street-lighting and electricity. We also have a surfeit of photographs, diaries, novels, textbooks and early film to show us how our Victorian antecedents lived and thought.

Great examples are *Diary of a Nobody* by George & Weedon Grossmith or Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat,* as they share identical concerns, humour and aspirations of that period, when compared to our own.

But the attraction also lies in the fact that so much is different today from the experiences of our Victorian ancestors. There was no universal suffrage, no television or radio, no air travel, no computers or Internet, no motorways and no surveillance cameras. Those too, were the days when foreign travel - let alone air travel - for the average man in the street was non-existent unless he was in his nation's armed forces. In fact, the grandeur of the British Empire and its military might is another part of the Steampunk equation.

The biggest Empire in human history and the colonial apparatus that maintained its global might holds a deep fascination for a large swathe of the movement. And there is something about the idea of a tiny island nation exporting its language and customs to the far-flung corners of the world that fires the imagination.

More than a few Steampunk novels deal with the 'what might have been' possibilities of the British military possessing fantastic airships and modern weapons of mass destruction, and many Steampunkers enjoy donning the pith helmets and uniforms of Her Majesty's Imperial Britain, albeit often updated with the requisite addition of clockwork prosthetic arms or brass goggles.

While some find the days of Empire fascinating and accept colonialism and imperialism as facts of life and just the way things were at the time, others are determined to challenge these past assumptions. The thinking is that by confronting the transgressions of the past, we can learn how to change the politics and socio-economics of the present. Others argue that the 'punk' in Steampunk should stand for something and that the movement should follow a more anarchic approach by emphasising Steampunk's rejection of 21st Century consumerism and the bland mass-produced goods our modern corporate culture bombards us with.

This argument tries in to widespread global concerns about sustainability; the fact that this part of the movement is interested in D.I.Y. and recycling is something that has attracted growing attention. By recycling discarded garments and objects, Steampunk fashions and art pieces are an integral part of this process.

Steampunk author Gail Carriger catches the mood nicely in this quote from the *Steampunk II (Steampunk Reloaded)* anthology>

There is a pervading sense of political upheaval and economic chaos right now, a sense that the world is crumbling around us… Steampunk is quietly coping with this impending doom by busily tying itself to the green movement, reusing old parts for new beauty."

Top: Darth Saber, *ZX 1933 "Cosmic Viper"*. 2007.

Above: Mike Libby, *Rhino* (Xyloryctes Jamaicensis). 2000. Rhino beetle with brass watch parts and gears.

Left: Mike Brown, *Titanium and Brass Photochromatic, Variable-Aperture Goggles.* 2009.

CHATOU
№257

It is undeniable that Steampunk, as an art movement, is all about old-fashioned craftsmanship. In a world where digital gadgets perform so many tasks, and where people are so disconnected from the technologies they use every day, the idea of building things that have visible mechanisms took on a global resonance.

Across the world, craftsmen, artists and tinkerers happily got their hands dirty putting together cogs and gears to recapture the spirit of do-it-yourself that had seemed to be fading from society. Steampunk art was thus uniquely forged in the workshop glow of soldering irons and welding tools, in the idea that people could and should build things for themselves.

With the engineers and the D.I.Y. brigade in the vanguard, other forms of art quickly followed - from custom-made items of clothing, to paintings and animation. But the inspiration for all of it is almost always the throbbing, steam-powered heart of Victorian technology and the world it created.

Thanks to the great advances achieved over those years, the future, to the Victorian mind, had a seemingly infinite number of possibilities opened up to it. In essence then, this movement is fuelled by a love of Neo-Victorianism mixed with a healthy dose of 21st Century post-punk attitude and an embracing of the aesthetics of do-it-yourself technology.

Steampunk may conjure up visions of guys and girls at Comic-Con dressed in Victorian finery and carrying 19th Century styled ray-guns made of polished wood, iron and brass. Others may imagine a solitary craftsman hard at work transforming his laptop into a period-friendly spectacle of leather and mahogany. Others still will think of Alan Moore's comic books or of the dozens of novels that transform the Victorian era into one of battling steam robots and giant airships.

While Steampunk can be about wearing brass goggles, fancy waistcoats, patent leather boots, lace corsets and dreams of steam-powered airships, it is also about the sheer joy of building a clockwork mechanism that a Victorian craftsman would have been proud of.

And while it can be just about speculating and imagining what might have been, for others it's about taking the 1890s as a starting point for deconstructing and changing the politics and socio-economic realities of the present. But, whatever the reasons, romantics, goths, punks, geeks, fashionistas, artists and engineers have all embraced this fast growing culture: a culture that now stands on the verge of mainstream recognition.

Above: Tom Couture, *SteamTuesday: Steampunk Photography.*
2010. Photography.

Left: Marcin Jakubowski, *Titanomachy: Fall of the Hyperion.*
2009. Digital artwork.

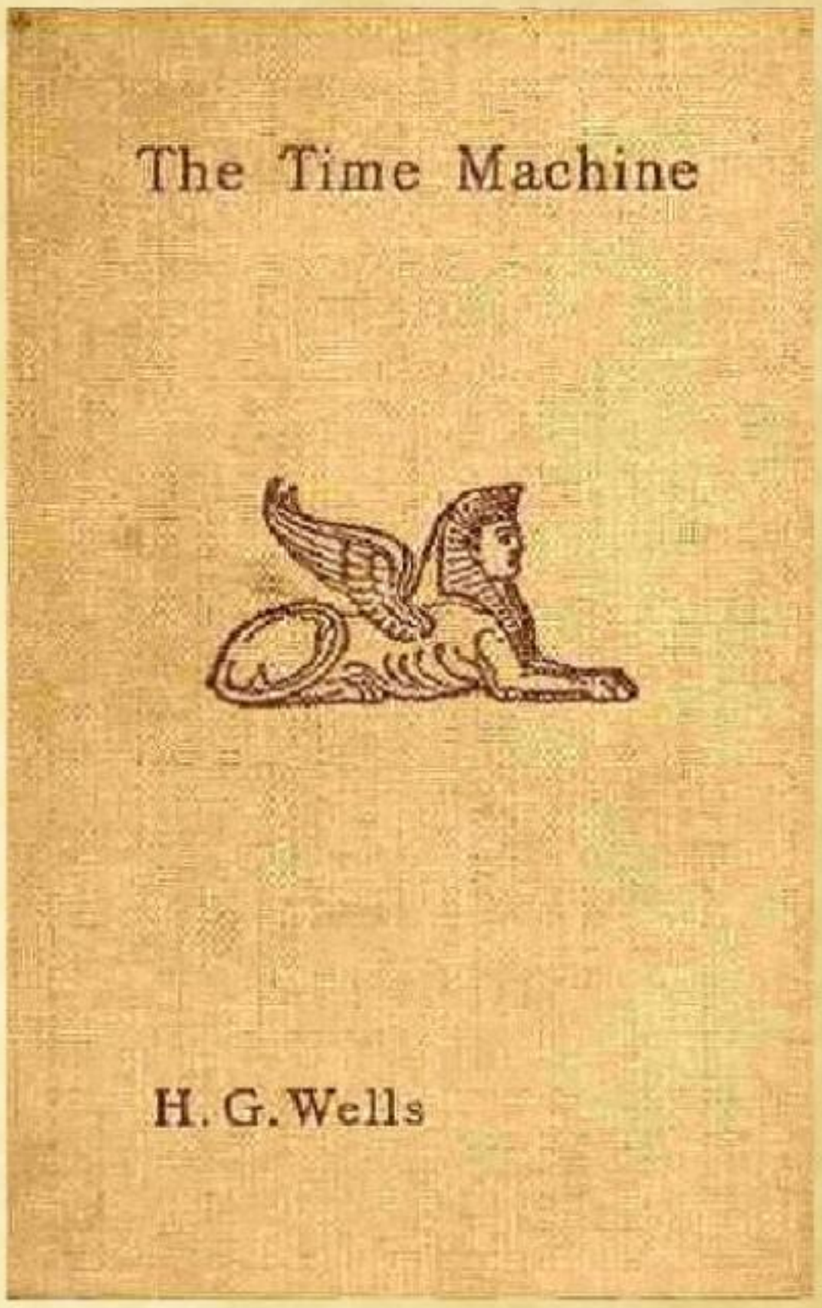
Following Pages: JP Targete, *The Tin-Tin Maker.*
2011. Digital artwork.

THE RISE OF STEAMPUNK

As a contemporary subculture, Steampunk is rare in that it started life on the printed page, as a literary genre. That genre, an offshoot of Science Fiction, was inspired by a plethora of influences including the gothic horrors of Mary Shelley and Bram Stoker, the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and the novels of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. It was the rapid industrialisation of Western society and an accompanying increase in a literate and educated middle class that led to the unprecedented explosion of novel writing in the latter half of the 19th Century. With the world changing at an ever faster pace as new frontiers were opened up by colonisation and innovation, the boundaries of human imagination were explored by authors excited at the monumental changes they saw happening around them. For a while science and technology were out-running creative imagination but, by the 1880s, that all started to change.

If the last years of the 19th Century saw the blooming of Science Fiction literature as we now know it (called Scientific Romances at the time of their writing), Mary Shelley's Frankenstein was the first seed of the genre. Originally published in 1818, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* gave the world its first Sci-fi creature and created the blueprint for the 'mad scientist' cliché of modern popular culture.

Although lying firmly in both the Gothic and Romantic novel traditions, Frankenstein broke the mould of both, by warning that man's growing scientific knowledge could threaten and ultimately upset the natural order. Frankenstein deservedly has its place in the movement's lexicon and has served as inspiration for both art and literature over recent years.



Above: H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*. Cover by Ben Hardy, William Heinemann. 1895, 1st edition.

Left: Kevin Mowrer, *Frankshtine*. 2010. Digital artwork.

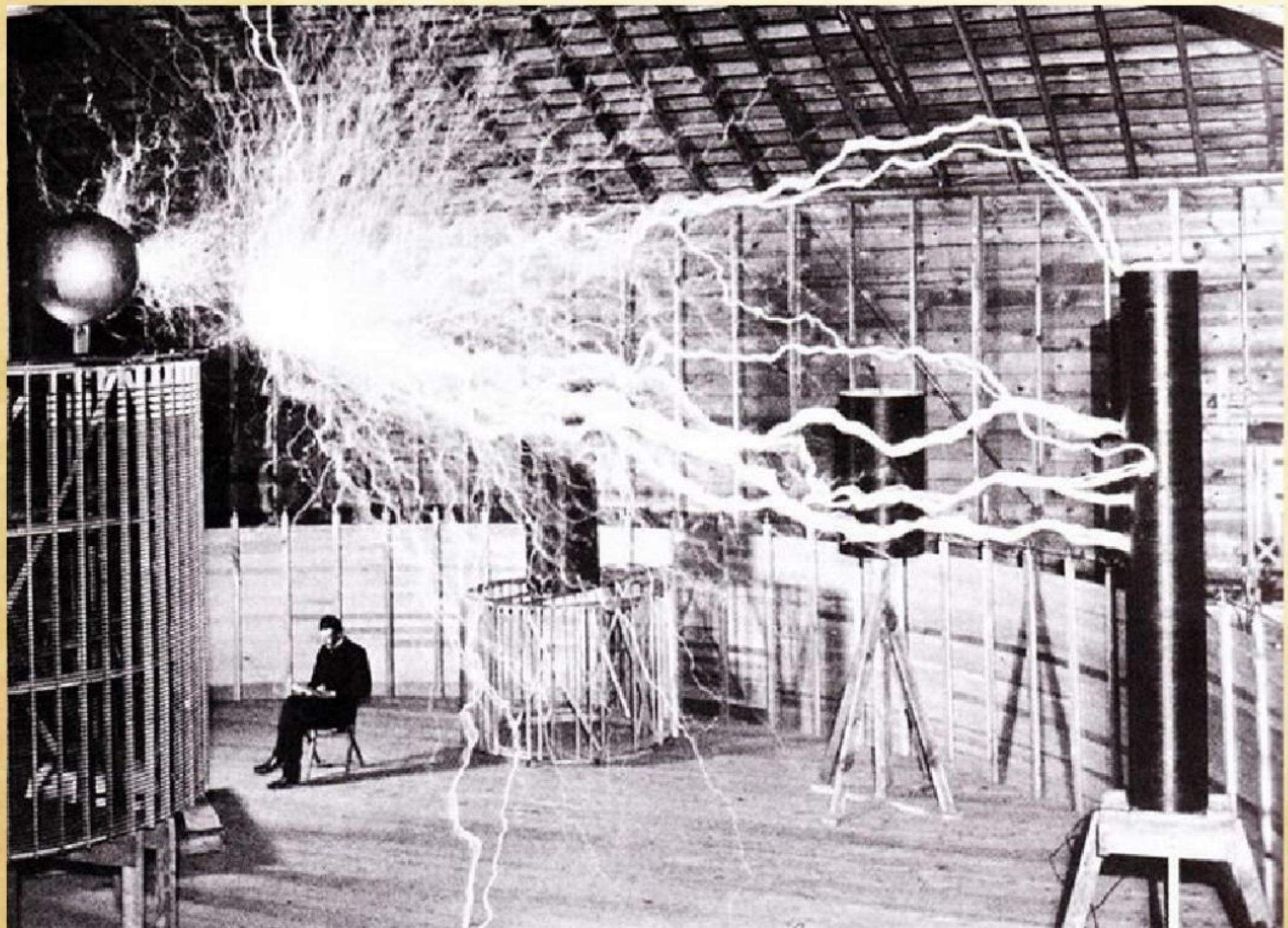
Far Left: DesHanley, *First Men in the Moon*. 2010. Digital artwork.

THE AGE OF EXPERIMENTATION

Above: Thomas Edison, *Light Bulb*. 1879.

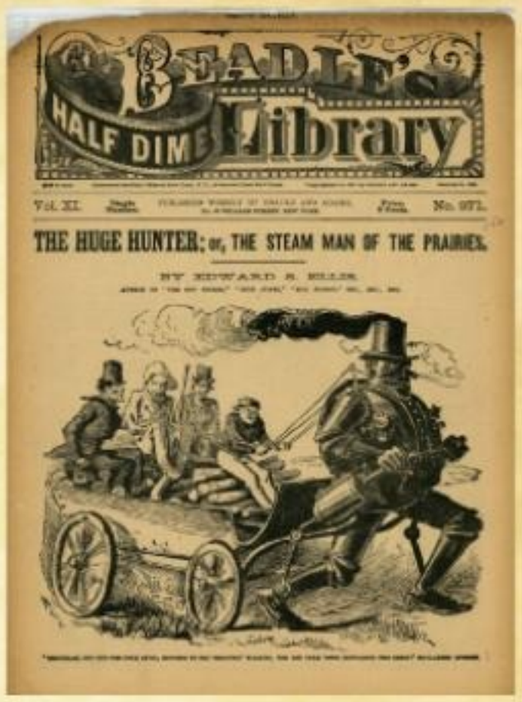
Below: Nikola Tesla, *Magnifying transmitter*. 1899. 22ft long.

Despite the success of Shelley's novel, it took several more decades of fast-paced industrialisation and scientific advancement before the real heyday of Victorian Science Fiction began. The mid to late 19th Century was an age of extraordinary experimentation, when science, industry and technology were driving massive changes in Western society. Innovators, engineers and scientists such as Michael Faraday (magnetic induction and electromagnetic rotary devices), Isambard Kingdom Brunel (bridges and steam ships), Charles Babbage (mechanical computers), Ada Lovelace (writer and arguably the world's first computer programmer), Thomas Edison (the phonograph and the light bulb), Nikola Tesla (electromagnetism) and hundreds of other extraordinary people were expanding the boundaries of human knowledge and creating a new world - a world we all now inhabit. This was an era when it seemed that anything might be possible. In addition, the appearance of numerous Science Fiction publications was testament to the way that limit was being pushed.

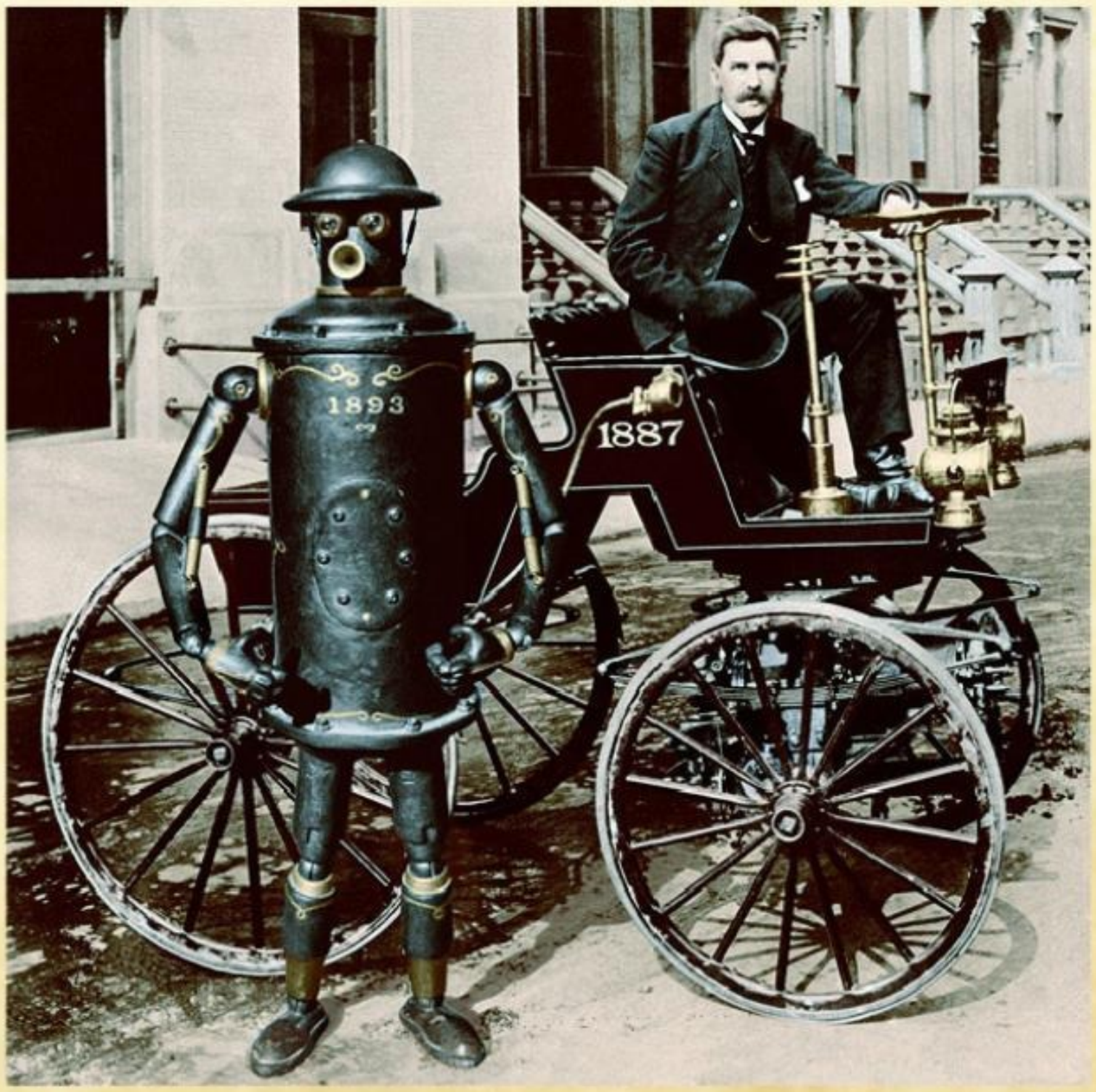


THE EDISONADES

An early entry into the field and an important component of the Steampunk legacy were the American mass-produced 'dime novels' of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Aimed mainly at teenagers, these publications usually featured a young inventor using his wits and his inventions to thwart America's enemies, advance progress and make himself rich. These Edisonades as they are now dubbed (after Thomas Edison) tapped into the growing popular interest in engineering and inventions then sweeping the United States and Europe. The first of the Edisonades was *The Huge Hunter, or The Steam Man Of The Prairies* by Edward S. Ellis (published in 1868); the Steam Man of the title was a steam-powered 'robot' built by a hunch-backed teenager who used it to explore the Wild West, dig up gold and fight 'Injuns'. This simple formula was repeated time and again in subsequent dime novels and the Steam Man has resurfaced in several contemporary US Steampunk short stories and in the guise of the illustrated history of a steam-robot called Boilerplate.



BOILER PLATE
WEEKLY MAGAZINE.
Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.
FROM ZONE TO ZONE! OR, THE WONDERFUL TRIP OF CAMPION, JR.,
WITH HIS LATEST AIR-SHIP "NOVELTY."



Top: Edward S. Ellis, *The Huge Hunter, or The Steam Man Of The Prairies* Vol. XI.
1882.

Above: Boilerplate Weekly Magazine, No.13.
1903.

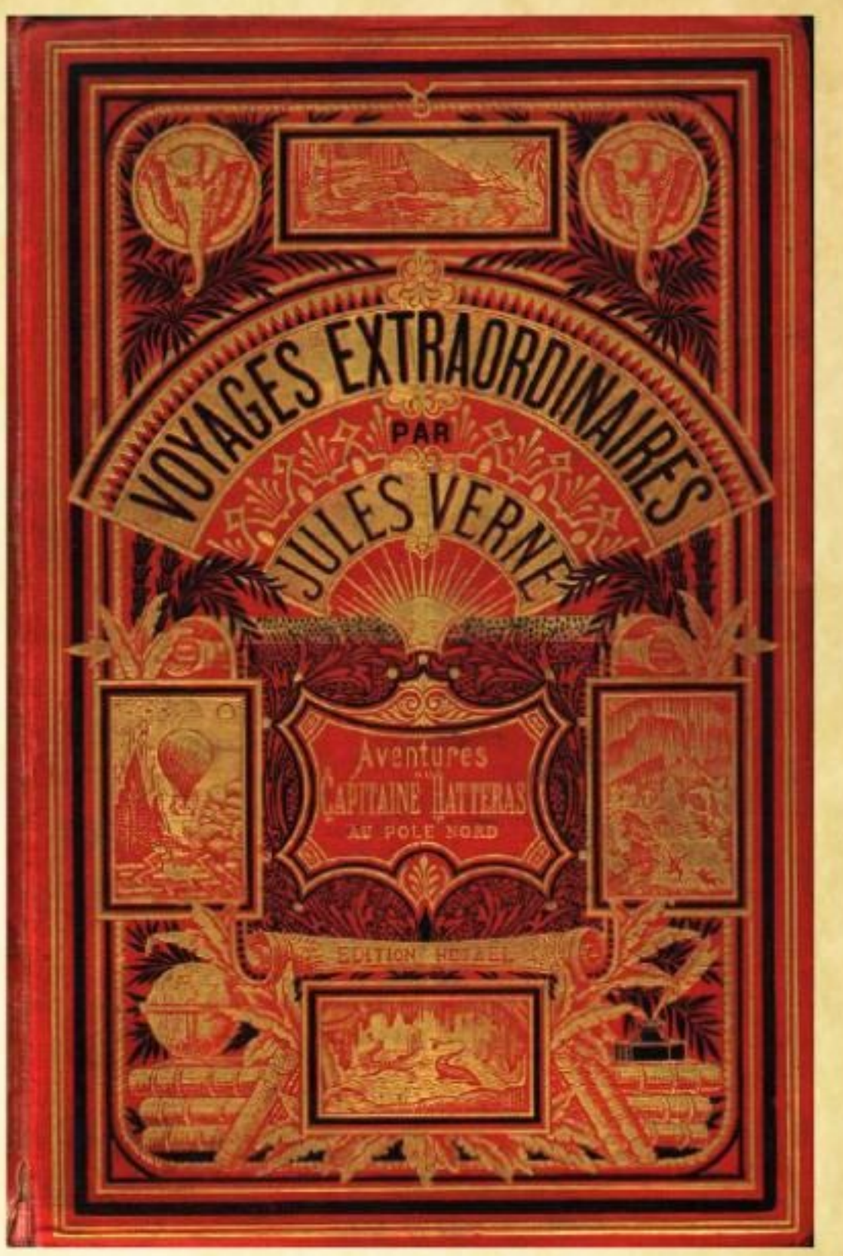
Left: Paul Guinan, *Boilerplate*.
2000.

THE PIONEERS OF MODERN SCIENCE FICTION

However, it was on the other side of the Atlantic that Steampunk's main inspirations originated. The Frenchman Jules Verne and the Englishman H. G. Wells were the pioneers of modern Science Fiction. They laid the groundwork for almost all the Science Fiction writing that followed. Verne's numerous novels, known under the banner title *Voyages Extraordinaires*, were more on the romantic side of the Scientific Romances than Wells' darker subject matters. But *Journey to the Centre of the Earth, Around the World in Eighty Days, 20,000 Leagues under the Sea* and *From the Earth to the Moon* captured the public's imagination with their unprecedented explorations of air, sea and earth.

Not only did Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* predict such inventions as deep sea submarines, floating cities and spacecraft that splashed down in the ocean on their return from the moon, but he also created such unforgettable characters as Phileas Fogg from *Around World In Eighty Days* and the tormented utopian Captain Nemo in *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*. From 1864 until his death in 1905, Verne wrote over fifty novels and left behind a body of work that continues to inspire new generations. Wells' career started somewhat later than Verne's, but his writings had even more influence and popularity than those of the Frenchman's. Wells not only brought the invading Martians to Earth, took man to the Moon, created a Time Machine and an Invisible Man, but also warned of the consequences of genetic engineering and atomic bombs and predicted mechanized warfare.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Wells took a rather bleak view of the scientific advances he saw around him and the futures those advances could lead to. In his *The War of the Worlds* it isn't science or technology that saves mankind from the murderous Martians, but Mother Nature, in the shape of Earth's common or garden bacteria, that destroys the invaders. And in *The Time Machine* he predicted that industrialisation would divide society into two classes and eventually into two almost distinct species - the cannibalistic Morlocks, who dwell below ground and are the descendants of Victorian factory workers, and the Eloi - the offspring of the rich who have regressed into effete, delicate little creatures that still dwell on the surface and live a pampered existence (when not being eaten by the Morlocks). Wells took great delight in juxtaposing the order and straight-laced sensibilities of the late-Victorian era with the chaos caused to that society by the fantastical technologies he dreamt up.



Above: Jules Verne, *Voyages Extraordinaires*. 1920.

Left: Patrick Reilly, *Into the Depths*. 2007. Digital artwork.

Following Pages: Unknown, *Naval Ship*. Digital artwork.

The era of Wells' and Verne's most inspired writing was also the golden age of Victorian fantasy, a period which provided numerous works that still resonate in popular culture. From the disturbing *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, to the relative innocence of Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*, a wealth of themes and characters were created - a rich legacy in which Steampunk and Neo-Victorianism have happily revelled.

And with the adventure novels of Rudyard Kipling and H. Rider Haggard giving us tales of far-flung empires and lost worlds, the prototypes were provided for contemporary Steampunk stories with their alternative versions of European Imperialism. Indeed, Kipling's 1905 story *With The Night Mail: A Story Of 2000 A.D.* features one of the key elements of a current Steampunk obsession - an imagined future in which lighter-than-air machines circle the globe. But it is for the innovative works of Verne and Wells that the fin de siécle era is best remembered.

With hindsight this was a period of seeming enlightenment and a time of relative peace and prosperity compared with what was to come. The age of fantasy and Scientific Romances ended in the bloody carnage of the First World War as the technology that had once inspired the Victorians was used to create machine guns, flame throwers, heavy artillery, Dreadnought battleships, tanks, bomber airships and mustard gas.

Next to the brutal realities of the War, and its effects on Western civilisation, the novels of Wells and Verne suddenly seemed naïve and old-fashioned - there's nothing more distant than the recent past.

Above: Nick Kole, *Steampunk Airship Pilot.*
2007. Digital artwork.

Left: Hideyoshi, *Time Machine.*
2008. Digital artwork.

Far Left: Guillaume Dubois, *Alice's Adventures in Steamland.*
2009. Digital artwork.

Top: Peter McPartlin, *Edwardian Gentleman.* Circa 1910.

Above: Mark Robertson, *Gormenghast.* 1993. Original illustration for the book.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF STEAMPUNK

It was to be over forty years and another horrific World War before their books and the Victorian aesthetic once again had a significant impact on popular culture and public consciousness. The first glimmer of that re-emergence appeared in the strange, claustrophobic gothic novels of Mervyn Peakes's *Gormenghast* trilogy. *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959) were firmly in the gothic fantasy vein and the universe Peake created was steeped in Victorian imagery. However it was Hollywood that really re-introduced the styles and themes of Neo-Victorianism to a mid-Century public.

Walt Disney's 1954 adaptation of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*, starring Kirk Douglas and James Mason, gave a whole new generation a chance to discover the wonders that Verne had created. The model of Captain Nemo's Nautilus submarine used in the movie is a prototype of Steampunk fantasy and the very stuff Steampunk dreams are made of - good solid Victorian engineering and elegant design, yet with powers far beyond its time.

A few years later Hollywood put another Verne epic, *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, on the silver screen, while behind the Iron Curtain the Czech film, *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, used a mixture of animation and real actors to create a masterpiece that looked like the illustrations from Verne's books brought to life. The success of these films led to the movie business then adapting one of Wells' most beloved novels. Released in 1964, *The Time Machine* did a wonderful job of capturing the feel and scope of the original novel and continues to capture imaginations to this day.

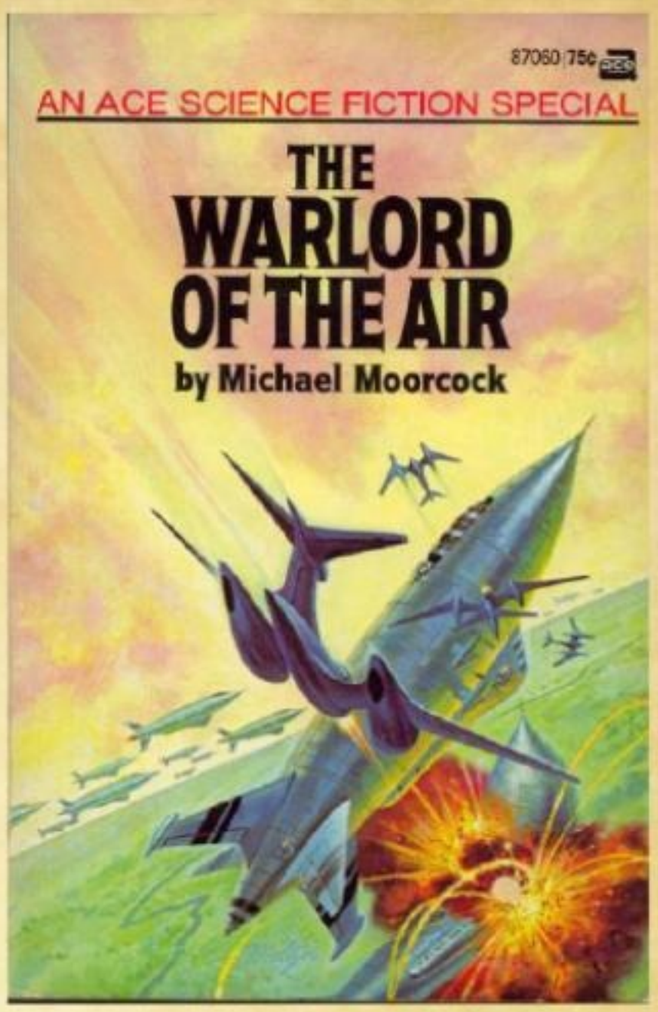
As for the written word, the beginnings of Steampunk literature itself, can be traced back to 1962 and Keith Laumer's novel *Worlds of the Imperium*, which conjured up a series of parallel universes patrolled by an all-powerful British Empire. The idea of a past where Queen Victoria's Empire grew more powerful rather than fading away was also picked up in Ronald W. Clark's 1967 novel *Queen Victoria's Bomb*. Clark's novel coincided with an on-going pop culture rediscovery of Victorian and Edwardian style and had sartorial elegance. The British had long had a penchant for the era, a penchant that manifested itself just after the Second World War with the resurgence of Edwardian men's fashion amongst the young upper-classes. Their attempt to recall the heady days of Empire was quickly adopted and bastardised by aspirational working class youths from South and East London.

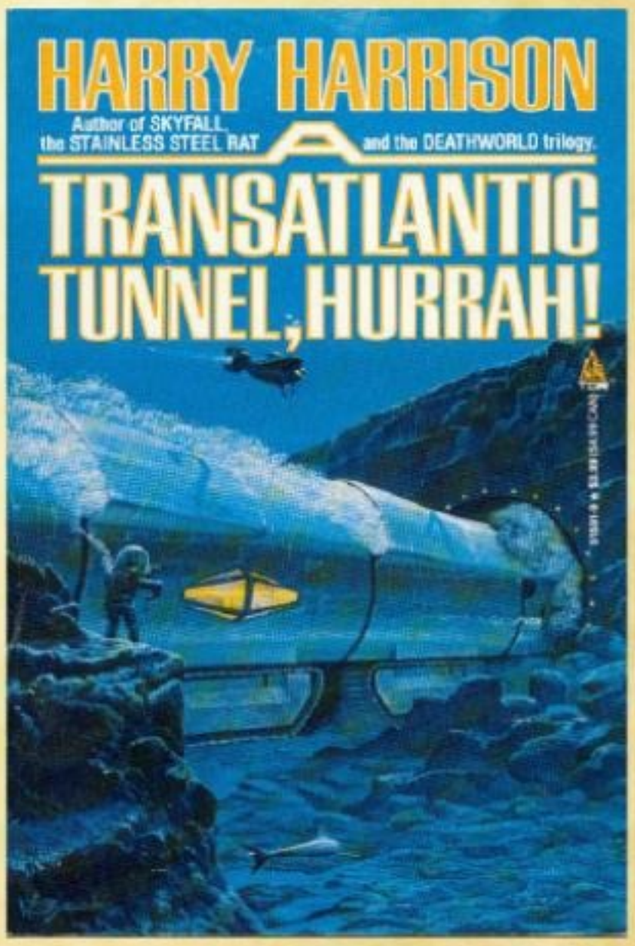
Completely subverting the posh boys' Imperial nostalgia, the working-class 'Teddy Boys and Girls' ('Ted' shortened from 'Edwardian') made the style their own and thus challenged their perceived place in Britain's class-bound society. This usurpation of the style of the Edwardian gentlemen is something the more politically minded of today's Steampunks can definitely appreciate.

The dapper Edwardian gentleman was also the inspiration for the suave, bowler-hatted John Steed in the innovative TV detective series *The Avengers*, which ran from 1962 until 1969. Not content with just the Edwardian look, the BBC broadcast a series which took a fictional Edwardian adventurer, frozen in ice in 1902, who is then thawed out in the Swinging London of 1966. *Adamant Lives* had the swashbuckling hero befriend a mini-skirted Mod girl and battle various modern criminals, whilst carrying a sword-stick and living in an Edwardian decorated flat above a multi-storey car park. The growing mid-1960s fascination with that earlier period also manifested itself in the fashion craze of modish youngsters wearing Victorian army tunics - a craze supposedly begun at a London fashion boutique called I Was Lord Kitchener's Valet. Victoriana and flower power seemed to blend quite happily in the colourful chaos of Swinging London and was adopted by the likes of Jimi Hendrix and the Sgt. Pepper's era Beatles.

But flower power and the innocent days of smoking pot and dressing up as Victorian Hussars ended quickly. After the Manson murders, Altamont and the break-up of the Beatles, the optimism of the Sixties soon mutated into the post-euphoric comedown of the 1970s. And, as the Vietnam War peaked and the global economy tanked, the cultural mood switched to a period of pessimism.

That prevailing cultural angst was certainly reflected in the Science Fiction community, both via the written word and on celluloid. It was during this period that one of the most important literary precursors to Steampunk appeared. Michael Moorcock's *A Nomad of the Time Streams* trilogy began with the 1971 novel *Warlord of the Air*. Moorcock's trilogy reflected the anti-colonial, anti-American and pro-socialist views then prevalent in Europe, but what made the trilogy also notable from a Steampunk point of view was its pioneering use of steam-powered airships as weapons of war. In 1972 Harry Harrison's novel *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!* also delved into alternate history and imagined a world in which the Americans had lost the War of Independence and were, decades later, part of an increasingly powerful and aggressive British Empire.





Top: Michael Moorcock, *Warlord of the Air.* 1971, published by Ace Books.

Above: Henry Henrison, *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!* 1972, serialised in Analog magazine.

While Moorcock's and Harrison's Victorian-inspired novels were rebellious and anti-establishment in tone, the Sci-fi films of the early 1970s were nihilistic visions of apocalyptic futures, where science had done precious little good and seemingly much harm.

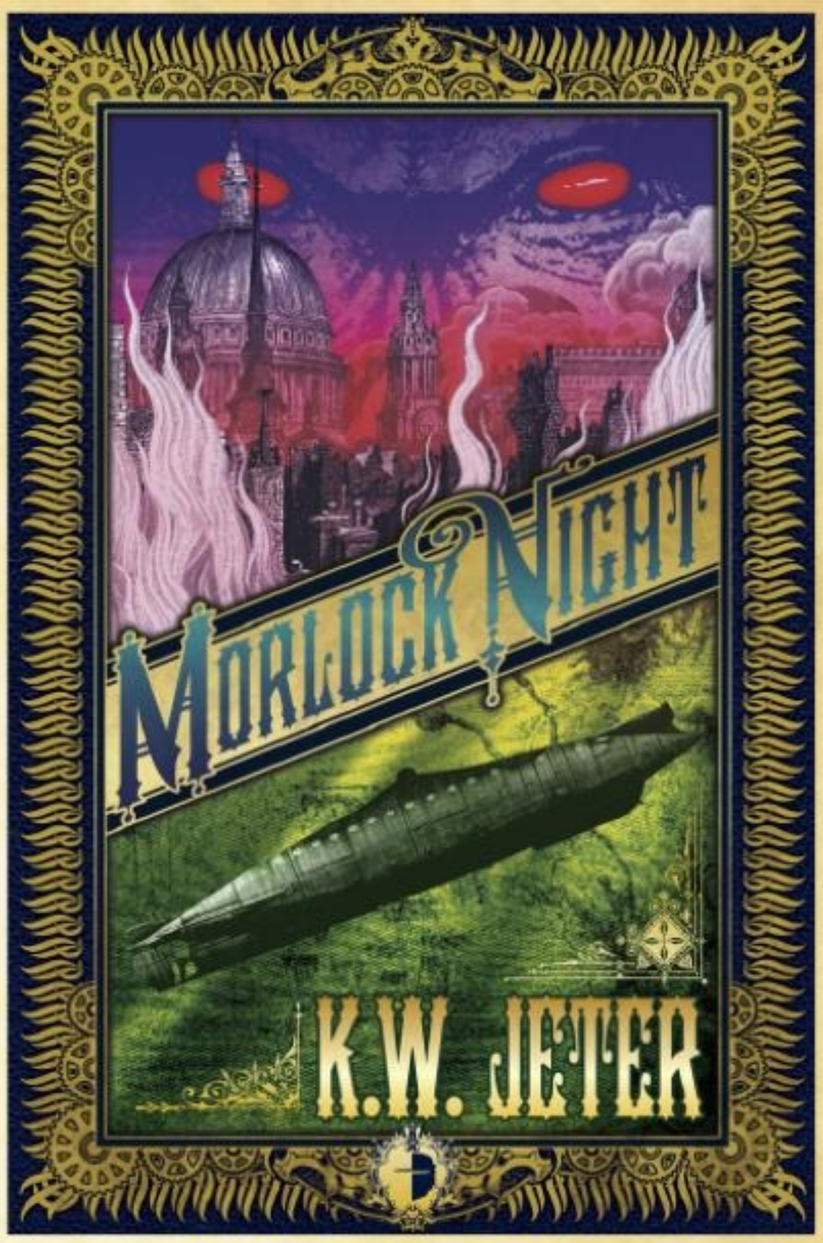
A trio of films in 1971 *The Andromeda Strain*, *The Omega Man* and *A Clockwork Orange* set the trend and *Silent Running* (1972), *Soylent Green* and *Westworld* (1973) and *A Boy and his Dog* (1975) all piled in to portray man's future as either dystopian or post-apocalyptic. A couple of years later and the nihilism prevalent in popular culture seemed complete as the Sex Pistols sang the punk anthem *God Save the Queen* with its sing-a-long 'no future' chorus. Even the relatively upbeat *Star Wars* in 1977 opened with the immortal words: A long time ago in a galaxy far far away...'.

With the future so effectively written off it was perhaps no wonder that some amongst the Science Fiction community began looking to the previous century for inspiration as the '70s ended. A couple of Hollywood movies of the period dabbled in the Victorian era - H. G. Wells and Jack the Ripper visited San Francisco in the 1979 movie *Time After Time* while Stephen Spielberg gave a nod to Victoriana in the underrated *Young Sherlock Holmes* - but, once again, it was literature which really embraced the revival of Neo-Victorian influence.

Taking H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* as his starting point, author K. W. Jeter imagined a past where the Morlocks of the distant future use the Time Machine to invade Victorian London. While it can be argued whether *Morlock Night* is a candidate for one of the first true Steampunk novels, there's no doubting the fact that Jeter actually coined the word 'Steampunk'.

In a letter to the Science Fiction magazine *Locus* in 1987, Jeter, who had just published another proto-Steampunk novel *Infernal Devices*, wrote that he was trying to find a tongue-in-cheek collective term for the Science Fiction of himself, Tim Powers (with *The Anubis Gates* in 1983) and James Blaylock (*Homunculus* in 1986). His letter to *Locus* read, in part:

"Enclosed is a copy of my 1979 novel Morlock Night*... it's a prime piece of evidence in the great debate as to who in 'the Powers/Blaylock/Jeter fantasy triumvirate' was writing in the 'gonzo-historical manner' first... Personally, I think Victorian fantasies are going to be the next big thing, as long as we can come up with a fitting collective term for Powers, Blaylock and myself. Something based on the appropriate technology of the era; 'like steampunks,' perhaps... "*



Above: K. W. Jeter, *Morlock Night.*
1979.

Left: Square Enix, *Final Fantasy XII,* a video game set in an apocalyptic future.
1997. Video game.

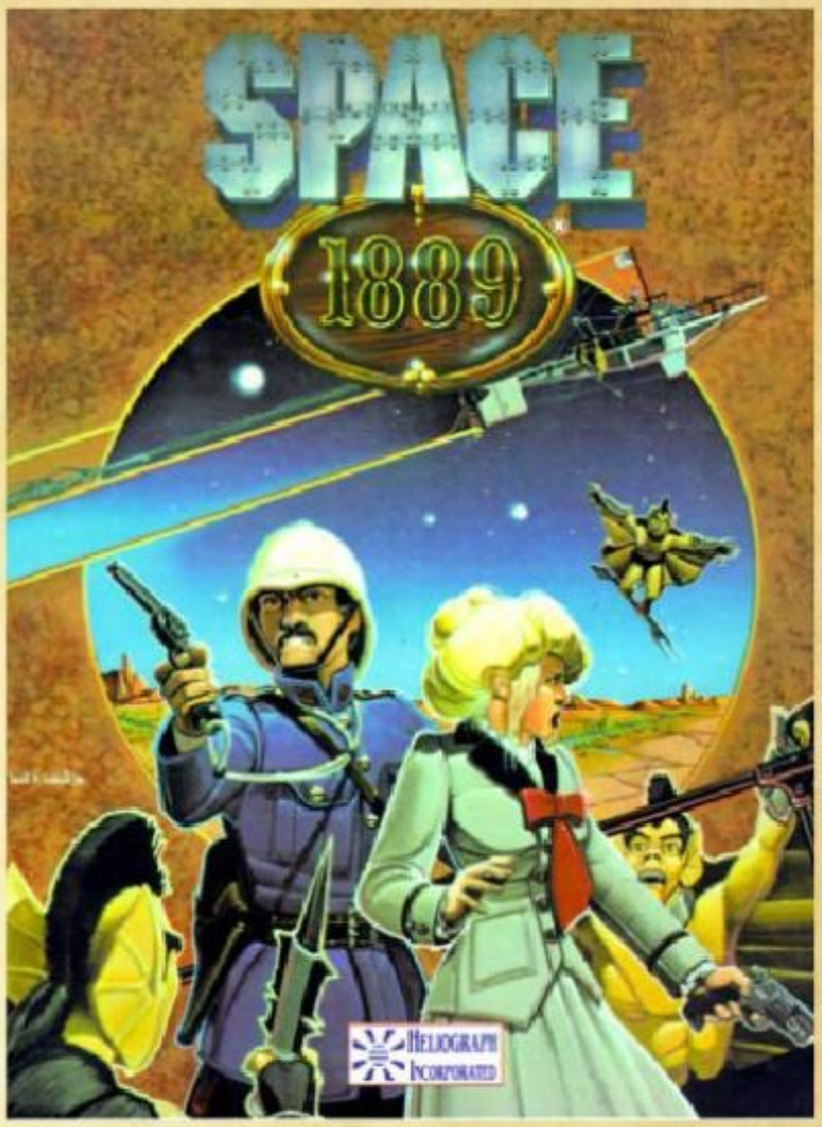
Following Pages: Tom McGrath , *The Airship Battle.*
2009. Digital artwork.

STEAMPUNK ESTABLISHED AS A GENRE

So the name was out there but, ironically, the novelists who really put Steampunk on the map were William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, two authors who were most associated with the futuristic genre of Cyberpunk. While Cyberpunk was set in the century to come, Gibson and Sterling embraced the Steampunk concept with their joint work, *The Difference Engine*, and set their epic story in the century past. Published in 1990, it imagined a violent Dickensian London, where the information age had arrived a hundred years early due to Charles Babbage's successful development of his mechanical computer. The book was a critical and commercial success and the Steampunk genie was well and truly out of the bottle.

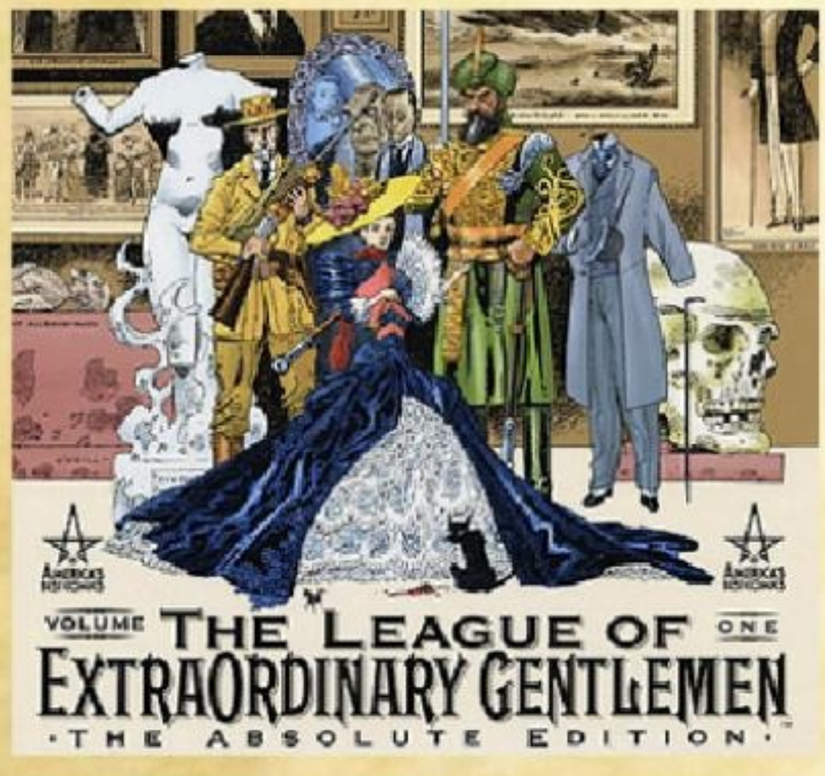
At around the same time the role-playing game *Space 1889*, created by Frank Chadwick and which had been released in 1988, was gaining popularity with gamers. Set in an alternate Victorian history where man travels to the other planets on an ether current, the visuals included pith helmeted, red-jacketed Victorian soldiers out to conquer the solar system. A generation which had been influenced by childhood viewings of *Zulu*, *The Time Machine* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* could now indulge their fantasies and enjoy their own alternative Victorian futures. Paul di Filipo's *The Steampnnk Trilogy* in 1995 was the first book to use the term in a title and the number of short stories and novels published in the genre grew steadily, rising to something of a crescendo as the first decade of the new century came to an end.

The growth of Steampunk literature was accompanied by a wider fascination with the Victorian and Edwardian eras. This, in turn, drew in new groups. Goths, in particular, were attracted to neo-Victorianism due in part to the 1993 horror film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* starring British actor Gary Oldman. Oldman's stylish portrayal of the younger Dracula in top hat and blue spectacles inspired many Goths to emulate Neo-Victorian fashion. This new influx pushed the fashion boundaries of the movement, allowing for more experimentation and cross-fertilisation of styles. In fact the Goth/Steampunk crossover has become so pronounced that the bi-annual Goth Festival in Whitby on England's North-East coast, is often now touted as a Goth and Steampunk festival. As a reaction to a bland mainstream pop culture, the partial adoption of Steampunk makes sense - the contrast between the vapid collection of teen vampire movies and TV series and the decadent Victorian blood-suckers couldn't be starker.



Above: Frank Chadwick, *Space 1889.*
Published in 1988 by Game Designers' Workshop.

Left: Brenton Cottman, *Castle Dracula.*
2005. Digital Artwork.



Top: Cover for *Wild Wild West*, the film. 1999.

Above: Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, *The League of Extraordinary Gentleman Volume One*. 1999-2000.

EXPANSION ACROSS THE GLOBE

On the cusp of the Millennium, everything was in place for Steampunk to go viral and it did so. In 1999 the film *Wild Wild West* was released, based on the '60's TV series of the same name. Featuring secret service agents, spies, evil scientists, infernal devices and alluring women, the series was typical of the innovative golden age of television. With its heavy dose of Science Fiction themes and the period setting of the late 19th Century, *Wild Wild West* was an obvious precursor to Steampunk. Sadly the movie left something to be desired - one of those remakes of a TV series which should never have been made - but the fact it was made at all showed that Steampunk had infiltrated Hollywood. Hollywood's flirtation with Steampunk and Victoriana has carried on to include *The Illusionist* and *The Prestige*, both from 2006, and Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* in 2009.

A far more important boost to the new movement's popularity came not from a novel or a film but from the comic book series *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, created by writer Alan Moore and artist Kevin O'Neill. Moore had made his name by creating the *Watchmen* series for D.C. Comics and his name alone ensured that *The League* would be noticed. Taking various Victorian fictional characters, including Mini Harker from *Dracula*, Captain Nemo from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and explorer Allan Quatermain from *King Solomon's Mines*, Moore threw them all together in a kind of Victorian super-hero secret service. *The League* was a freewheeling, colourful, multi-layered mash-up of Victorian fantasy, gothic horror, modern ultra-violence and Science Fiction.

Tongue-in-cheek, cynical and with three comic series and a graphic novel, *The League* was a huge success and prompted a disappointing film release in 2003. With the Internet connecting people as never before, the word on *The League* and Steampunk spread fast. As Cory Goss, editor of the excellent *Voyages Extraordinaires* website wrote in his online history of Steampunk:

"The League also came at the exact right time... This critical mass of Retro-Victorian coincided with the real emergence of the Internet into popular consciousness. The Internet, with its plethora of message boards, websites and e-mail groups, enabled Steampunk to coalesce from its varied strands by allowing individuals from all walks of life and fandom to find common ground in what was ultimately a shared love of retro-Victorian scientific fantasies, whatever their form."

Another comic book that attained cult status was Mike Mignola's *The Amazing Screw-On Head* which was published in 2002 by Dark Horse Comics and was made into a TV pilot in 2006. The Amazing Screw-On Head is a special agent robot working for President Lincoln, whose head can attach to different bodies as and when they are needed. The mix of robotics, vampires and the Lincoln-era setting made the comic an instant Steampunk classic.

Meanwhile, Steampunk's growing global reach was demonstrated by the production of Japanese animated films such as *Steam Boy*, *Castle in the Sky* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, all of which featured steam-powered airships and western fashions from the 19th Century. In turn, Japanese youth culture also embraced Neo-Victorianism via Cosplay (Cosplay being the trend for dressing up in costumes as fictional characters or ideas from comic books, films or Science Fiction). Paralleling the growing trend of Western youth dressing in Steampunk fashion, teenage Japanese girls adopted the Lolita style.

Lolita style is Victorianism with a twist - bonnets, lace and Victorian maids' costumes, but usually with very short skirts and more than a hint of Goth make-up. Like many in the global Steampunk movement the Lolita girls and their boyfriends seem to be yearning for an age of elegance and politeness, both of which are missing from the crassness and blatant sexuality of modern life. In fact, it was through fashion that some of the first Steampunk art and design made its initial appearance. Mechanised clockwork prosthetic arms, gas masks and brass goggles (for the crews of steam-powered airships), cogwheel jewellery and other sartorial additions were created by inspired D.I.Y designers and fashionistas. In the absence of commercially available accessories, Steampunks got busy and made their own, using their imaginations and inspiration gleaned from the Victorian and Edwardian past.

Above: Dark Romantics, *Clockwork Doll.* 2010. An example of Lolita style.

Left: Hayao Miyazaki, *Howl's Moving Castle.* 2004. Animated fantasy film.

CRAFTING AND 'MODDING'

Concurrent with these developments, other aspects of craftsmanship came to the fore of the movement. Designers and 'tinkerers' like Jake Von Slatt, founder of the innovative Steampunk Workshop website, and Richard 'Doc' Nagy (Datamancer) began 'modding' (remodifying) the keyboards and monitors of modern computers and turning them into objects that were Neo-Victorian in appearance. This was achieved by the painstaking and skillful addition of period-friendly and appropriate materials such as brass fittings, varnished wooden panels and leather inlays. Keyboards were taken to pieces and then re-assembled key by key into something that would not have looked out of place in H. G. Wells' study.

The overall effect was both strangely familiar yet confusing, and the transformation was from the purely functional to the elegantly crafted. It is hard not to compare the detail and elegance of the 'modded' version and the plain, just-out-of-the-box blandness of the originals and not come to the conclusion that the Steampunk version is the more visually interesting and more aesthetically pleasing. Crafting these machines and sculptures by hand also suggests an implicit rejection of modern, passive consumerism.

Writer Matthew Crawford, in his recent best-selling book *The Case for Working with your Hands* touches on the need and desire amongst men to be able to make and repair things. This all ties in with Steampunk's love of D.I.Y and mechanical things and its distaste for computerized gadgets and equipment that is increasingly hard to understand and impossible to repair.

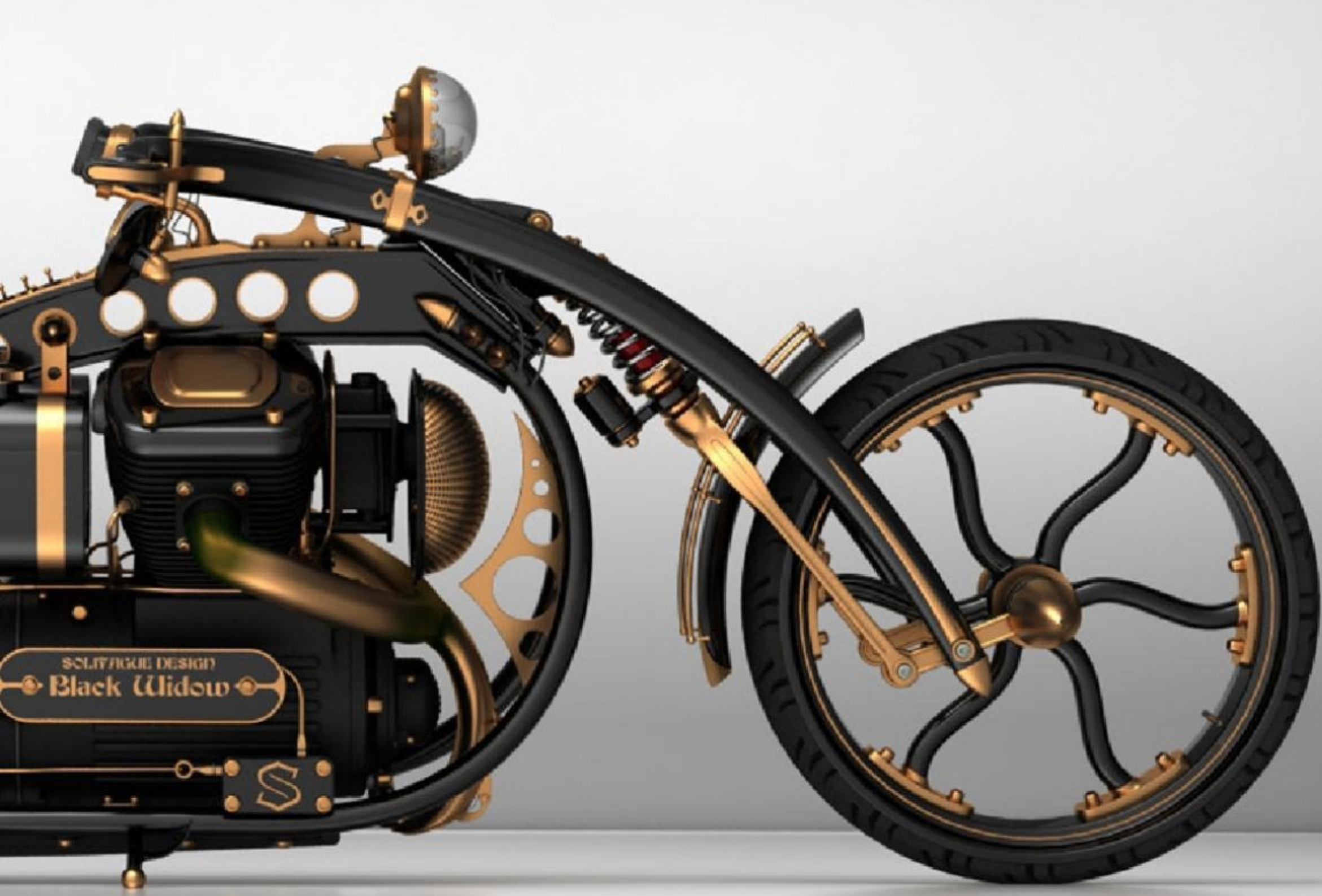
Simultaneously, other artists were also busy creating sculptures and non-functional machines that looked as though they had been constructed in the early 1900s rather than a century later. Amongst these works were amazing insects constructed from brass and steel, sleek steam-powered motorbikes, elegant ray-guns that seemed capable of discharging lethal beams of energy, Victorian space-helmets and animal-like robots. To these new craftsmen and craftswomen it didn't matter if the machine they created actually did anything; for them, and those who admired their work, it was all in the construction and beauty of the finished object. While many of these designs were non-functional, there were also those who rejoiced in producing clockwork mechanisms such as watches and clocks that not only looked the part but that worked as well, creating truly fascinating pieces of work.

Top and Above: Jeff de Boer, *Samurai Cat.* 2007.

Left: Frank Buchwald, *No. 01.* 2002.

Following Pages: Solifague Design, *Black Widow.* 2010. 3D Max.

solitaque design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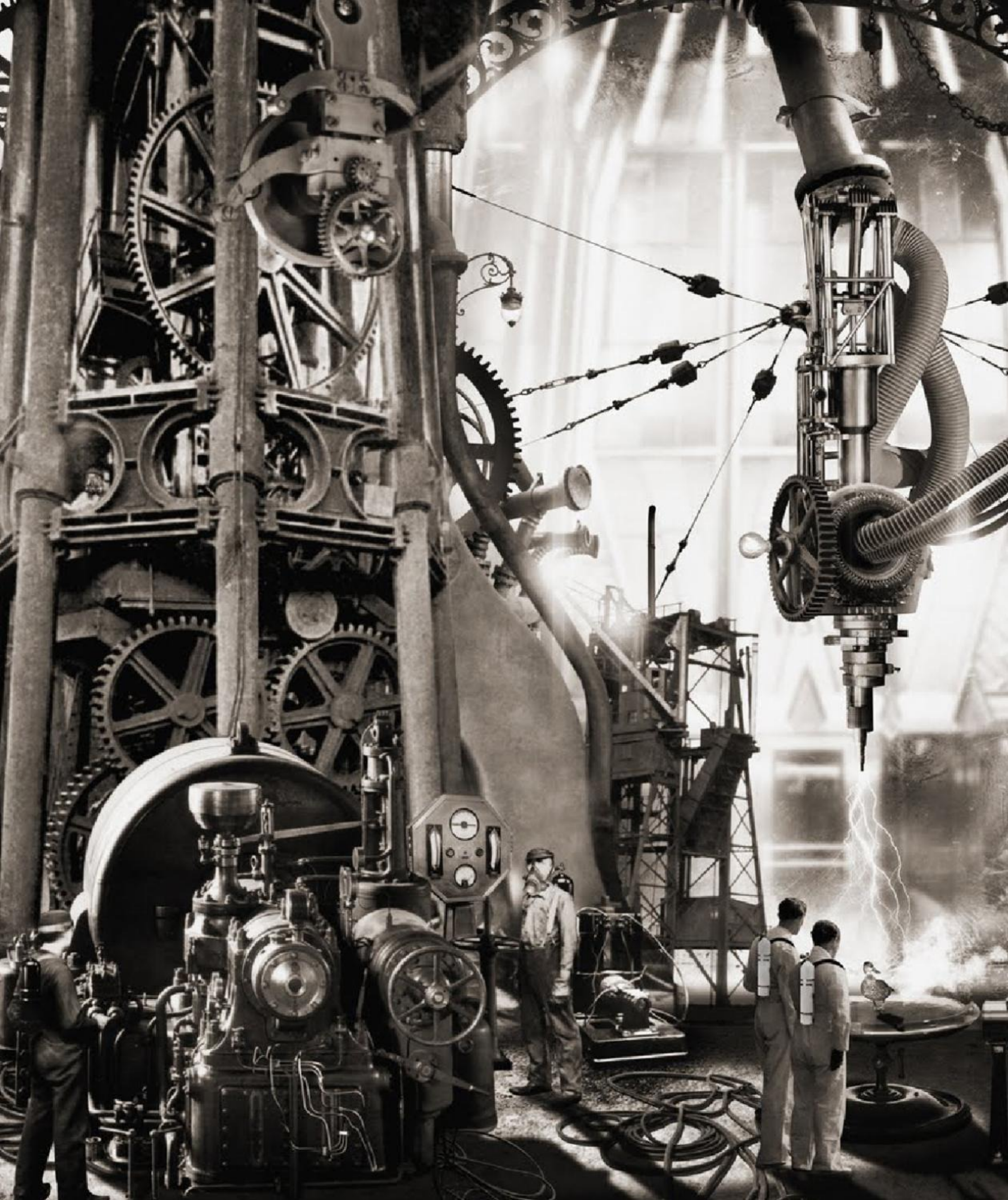

THE INTEREST OF THE PUBLIC

Although the creation of Steampunk art and objects had been almost the last piece of the movement to fall into place, the artists made up for lost time with a vengeance. The last five years have seen an explosion of creativity that shows no signs of abating. Artists, who had been quietly working on their own for years, found out there was a name for what they were doing and their artworks started to be exhibited not just on Steampunk websites, but at various Steampunk gatherings and art exhibitions. The first major exhibition of Steampunk art objects was held at the Museum of The History of Science, in Oxford, England from October 2009 through to February 2010 and featured eighteen Steampunk artists from around the globe. Curated by New York designer Art Donovan and attended by over 80,000 people, the exhibition was a resounding success and showed that the nascent art and design of the movement was to be taken seriously.

A few opening phrases from the broadsheet that accompanied the exhibition almost read like a manifesto for Steampunk creativity:

"In imagining a Victorian future that has not come to past, Steampunk artists cast an oblique light on the present. But their unrealised 'futures' are more celebratory than commentary. Steampunk revels in the ingenuity and absurdity of mechanism and the unqualified pleasure of making."

Since Oxford, more and more artists have either embraced Steampunk or produced work that fits the Steampunk aesthetic. Illustrations, paintings and photomontages have expanded the genre from its mechanical beginnings and new themes have moved the subject matter away from a purely Eurocentric core. There has also been a cross-over with the art of Dieselpunk that is focused on the styling, design and popular culture of the years from 1920 to 1945 including Art Deco, film noir, lounge crooners and big band music.

The photomontages of Sam Van Olffen, for instance, seamlessly blend Steam and Diesel punk and it's hard to tell where one genre ends and the other begins. The main linking factor between Diesel and Steam though is a love of pre-digital technology and appreciation of machines as art works, something that is evident in the growing public, as it grows bored of everyday's bland technology.

This appreciation has been encouraged by a series of major art projects that have managed to engage the general public's imagination by blurring the line between fact and fantasy, what can be real and what is still impossible.

Above: Doktor A, *Mechtorians: Stephan le Podd.* 2008.

Left: Sam Van Olffen, *Machine.* 2011. Photomontage.

The Telectroscope was a 2008 art installation erected on both sides of the Atlantic to create the fantasy of a rediscovered Victorian tunnel connecting New York to London.

With two giant brass telescopic lenses, that looked like machines from a Verne novel, built near Brooklyn Bridge in New York and Tower Bridge in London, fascinated passers-by could wave to their counterparts across the Atlantic. Supposedly built by Alexander Stanhope St. George during Queen Victoria's reign, the tunnel and its inventor were actually the creations of modern artist Paul St. George.

The media and the public didn't care that the two cities were really linked by modern video technology and everyone seemed happy to go along with the Victorian fantasy so cleverly presented to them.

A more permanent example of bringing Steampunk to life is the *Les Machines De L'île Nantes* art project in Nantes, Brittany France, the birthplace of Jules Verne. Created by Francois Delarozière and Pierre Orefice, the project is inspired by the mechanical ideas and fantasies of Verne and is built on the site of the former Nantes shipyards. This homage to the city's industrial past and the imagined worlds of Verne's stories features an on-site workshop and giant brass and iron sculptures, including a mechanised thirty-foot-high elephant.

Top: François Delarozière, *Le Grand Eléphant.* 2007. Mechanic animal.

Above and Right: Paul St George, *The Telectroscope.* 2008. Art installation.

As Steampunk and Neo-Victorian conventions started to appear, it made sense for musical entertainment to be provided for the convention-goers. SalonCon, over its three year run (2006-2009), featured entertainment by Goth solo artist Voltaire and the band Abney Park. Since then groups like Abney Park, Vernian Process and other sympathetic acts have provided the live musical entertainment at the growing number of Steampunk conventions.

Dressed in the appropriate fashions, playing 'modded' instruments and singing of airships and dark Victorian secrets, the bands attracted followings not just from the Steampunk community but also from others who are curious about the style. New bands quickly followed the pioneers and the likes of The Men That Will Not Be Blamed For Nothing, The Cog Is Dead, Clockwork Dolls, Dr. Steel and The Clockwork Quartet are all contributing to a musical genre that is as diverse as its numerous influences. Like Steampunk itself there is no exact definition of what constitutes Steampunk music, but that is part of its appeal and allows it to keep developing and experimenting.

Music, literature, fashion, art and design: Steampunk has come a long way from its early beginnings as a few books on Victorian futures that never were. It seems ironic that a movement that celebrates the aesthetics of a past century should also seem so contemporary - but that is what Steampunk is, and Steampunk art is one of the few, genuinely new art genres of the 21st Century.

Above: Jake Von Slatt, *Steampunk Stratocaster.* 2007. 'Modded' musical instrument.

Left: Vernian Process, a Steampunk band. 2003-present. Music band.

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Left Page: Brian Despain, *A Vexing Quiet.*
2007. Oil on wood.

Following Pages: Eric Freitas, *Mechanical No.7.*
2011. Sculpture.

Steampunk
simply embodies a time
and a place. The time... the late
19th century. The place... a steam powered
world, where air travel by fantastical dirigibles is as
common as traveling by train or boat (or submarine).
A place where national interests are vastly different than
our own version of history. A place where the elegant and
refined are as likely to get pulled into a grand adventure, as
the workers, ruffians, and lower classes. A place where the
idea of space travel is not so far fetched. A place where lost
civilizations are found and lost again. A place where anything
is possible, and science can be twisted to meet ones own
ends. That to me is the essence of Steampunk. It can
have political overtones and commentary, or
it can be straight escapist fiction. Either
way, if it meets these criteria. It is
Steampunk.